

familiar with this because it is so seldom used. In fact, it has only been used one time before this Congress successfully.

It is a moment for the Congress to be able to look back at regulations that have been promulgated by the administration and say: Was that the intent of the law?

It is something that we have worked at for a long time to be able to get as a frequent part of this national conversation. We call it the REINS Act. It allows Congress to be able to look at each major regulation when it comes out from the administration and ask the simple question: When the regulations are created, are they consistent with the statute? That is what regulations are. No administration can just invent policy and say: We think this is a good thing to do. That is the task of Congress. That is why the Constitution says that all legislative powers shall reside in the Congress, because an administration can't make up the law. It has to come from this body, from the House of Representatives, and then be signed by the President. After that is done, then regulations are created that have to be consistent with the law.

The Congressional Review Act was created years ago to allow Congress to have a second glance at regulations as they are put out and say: Is that consistent with the statute we passed? This Congress has already gone through multiples of those.

In the last 6 months of the Obama administration, many regulations were created. When they were created, they were not consistent with the statute. This Congress has already turned back billions of dollars of regulations from the American people. One of those was done this week. Ironically, it is an issue that deals with unemployment benefits and drug testing.

Many States have requested the ability to be able to do drug testing for unemployment benefits. And this is not a situation where this Congress believes that all people on unemployment benefits need to be drug tested or are unemployed because of drug use—far from it.

In 2012, Congress passed the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act. In that, it allowed States, if they chose to—they don't have to but if they chose to—to do drug testing for benefits eligibility, for unemployment benefits under two circumstances. One of them is if the applicant was terminated from their employment based on the unlawful use of a controlled substance. In other words, if they were just fired from a previous job because they were using drugs, they wouldn't be able to get unemployment benefits because they had already been certified as a drug user. The second one is that if the only available suitable work meant that they had to be drug tested, then they could be drug tested.

What is the design of this? The design of the policy was to encourage people to get back to work. If they were fired from a previous job because

they used drugs, it is a natural thing to say: Before you can get unemployment benefits, we want to make sure you have gotten off drugs since that time period you were fired, or if you will be drug tested for the only job that is available to you in your targeted area, you are not available to be able to take that job if you haven't already had some sort of drug testing.

It is a commonsense measure, and it is given to the States to say to the States: You can choose to do this or not to do this, but if you choose to do it, you can, because unemployment benefits are a partnership between the Federal Government and local States.

We believe this is one tool of many to be able to help people who are trapped in the addiction of drugs to have one more incentive to be able to get off that addiction. Multiple different methods are also used within States to enable them to walk alongside families and individuals and help them get off their substance abuse habits as well.

It is a powerful motivator to say to people: If you want to get some support into your family to help you transition back into a job, the law says that to be on unemployment benefits, you have to be available for work. And if this person is currently addicted to drugs and using drugs, they are not available for work.

This measure was passed in 2012. The Obama administration took 4 years to promulgate the rules off of this commonsense measure, and once they finally promulgated the rules, they created a set of rules so complex, so complicated, with so many exceptions built into it, that the rule meant nothing. It put us in the situation of saying: What Congress passed 4 years ago, we actually wanted that to go into effect to give those States the right to be able to do it.

So this Congress—the House of Representatives overwhelmingly voted and this week the Senate also voted to be able to block out that last-minute regulation from the Obama administration, which they took 4 years to promulgate, and to be able to say to the States: If you choose to do drug testing with someone who was fired from a previous job because of drug use or because the only job available to that person will have drug testing, if you want to help families be able to get off substance abuse and to be able to set this standard for them, you can.

We have an epidemic of drug use in our Nation. We should do everything we can to not only deal with the interdiction of drugs coming into the country but to also deal with abuse of drugs in our country. This is one of those measures, and I am glad my State and other States will again have that opportunity to be able to use this.

OKLAHOMA WILDFIRES

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, on January 15, 2017, an incredible ice storm came through my State. For

some States that haven't seen ice storms, they are beautiful, but boy are they destructive. As freezing rain comes down, it lands on power lines, lands on trees, destroys the trees, power lines come down, and it is incredibly difficult for families and for regions when this happens. You can't move. You can't function. You can't travel the streets because they are covered with ice. It is very destructive.

The northwest part of our State experienced an ice storm like that on January 15. That ice storm devastated the Woodward area and all over the northwest—trees, debris, damage, power out for weeks in that area.

Then, in early March, it was starting to warm up. The forecasters from the National Weather Service and the Forest Service saw the forecast coming out of rapidly dropping humidity levels and very high winds, with a lot of debris damage still in the area. It was the perfect storm for wildfires.

They prepositioned assets in that area to be able to respond if they broke out, but on March 6—just a week and a half ago—wildfires broke out all across northwestern Oklahoma. Four large fires in particular broke out simultaneously in multiple areas. Some of them were started by some of those same power lines that were weakened by the ice storm. Now the high winds—60 miles an hour—are taking down those weak power lines, and they are striking the ground and starting a fire spontaneously out in a field.

There were four individual fires across this area covering 315,000 acres just in Oklahoma. One of those fires spread straight across the Kansas border and burned an additional 472,000 acres. To give you a point of reference of how large these fires were, the total fire damage that was done in acres is greater than the entire State of Rhode Island. Twenty homes were destroyed, 3,000 cattle were killed in the field, 6,500 hogs were killed, and 7 people died in the fire.

Let me give you a picture of what we faced in this area as I went out last Friday with Senator INHOFE to tour the area both from the air and on the ground and to talk to farmers and those individuals who are trying to work through this very difficult process. Those farmers and ranchers are facing something you can't even imagine in their fields. For miles, there is no grass. The cattle that did survive the fire had literally no food on their ranch for miles. Hundreds of miles of fence line were taken down. Each mile of fence in Oklahoma, just a simple barbed wire fence, costs about \$10,000, and hundreds of miles of fence line were destroyed.

We have animals that burned alive as they tried to escape the fire. We had deer that, as they were running across the fields, got caught up in the barbed wire fence and 16-mile-per-hour winds, and the 16-mile-an-hour flame caught up with the deer in the fence and burned them alive as they tried to escape.

We have families who have lost absolutely everything.

We have volunteer firefighters across much of this area who would literally be fighting the fire in one county in one area and hear on the radio about how a fire had broken out in another county on a road right near their own home, and literally volunteer firefighters fighting one fire could hear on the radio about the destruction of their home at a different fire.

In different places, the volunteer firefighters and those who were gathered, both career and volunteers, would see a raging fire at the home of their neighbor, of people they knew. In western Oklahoma, you know your neighbors in that area. You know the folks in the county. They would head out to a home as the fire was rushing at them and try to fight it off, try to cut a fire line to be able to stop it. Eventually, the fire would get so close, they would literally take their fire equipment and park the equipment between the fire and the home and spray down their equipment in hopes that the fire would jump over the house as the firefighters just huddled behind their own equipment hoping the fire didn't come to them. They saved several homes by using that extreme method.

Neighbors took their own farm equipment and their own tractors and created fire lines to be able to protect their neighbors' homes.

These small community firefighters fought fires for hours and hours. They saved a lot of lives, and they saved a lot of structures.

I can't even begin to tell you the pain of walking through that area, what has been described by many as walking across a moonscape of destruction where there is literally nothing left.

What have we seen in that? I will state that what we have seen is a tenacious spirit from people who survived an ice storm, were without power for weeks in many areas, and then had a wildfire come right behind it and destroy what was left. Over 20,000 bales of hay have already been donated from farmers all over Oklahoma who are trying to feed the cattle that are still left—20,000 bales. Understand the expense of 20,000 bales of hay being donated but also understand the efforts of all the truckdrivers who loaded up their vehicles and personally paid the gas money and the travel expenses to be able to deliver that hay over hundreds of miles to those folks. Oftentimes, the travel of that truckdriver and the gas required are more expensive than the hay that is in the back of it, and they are delivering as much as they possibly can.

I have to thank the folks from the Farm Bureau; the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association; Western Equipment; Oklahoma Farm Credit; the Red Cross of Oklahoma; the Salvation Army; the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture; the Oklahoma Forestry Service; Southern Baptist Disaster Relief; Oklahoma emergency manage-

ment—first responders from all over the State, volunteer and career firefighters who worked very long and difficult hours. USDA and FEMA were also on site. I thank Harper County Extension; all the emergency management folks from Beaver, Harper, and Woodward Counties; all the folks who have donated, places like Love's Travel Stops that have donated so much to be able to move things there; the United Way; Cleanline Energy and their donations; and untold numbers of civic organizations and churches from around that community.

As I looked at many of those folks in the area last week and met with some leaders and pastors in the area, I reminded the folks that the devastation they face is not something that will be recovered from quickly. Springtime will come soon, and the area that is just black earth right now will spring to life with green grass again in the weeks ahead. But the loss of those fence lines, the loss of thousands of animals, the loss of homes, the loss of structures, will take a very long time for the folks—the farmers and ranchers who don't live on a high profit margin.

I have continued to encourage the pastors and churches in that area to walk alongside some families who will have a hard time recovering from this for a long time. I have encouraged our Oklahoma agencies and our Federal agencies to do what we can to be able to step in with repairing fence lines and helping them recover from a very traumatic event.

My wife and I stood with a rancher who talked about going out into the field after the fire. His home was completely destroyed. As he traveled out to the field around him checking on his cattle, he found dead cattle but also found cattle with their faces completely burned, blinded, with coyotes chasing them down. He said all he could do was stand there in the field and cry. These are going to be long days.

I am grateful that there are neighbors taking care of neighbors. I am proud of the people of Oklahoma watching out for each other. As we walk through this, God willing, we will continue to be able to hug and take care of our neighbors in the days ahead.

I want to tell this Senate and the people of the United States that this was a wildfire as big as the State of Rhode Island, and many people haven't even heard of it. But I can assure all of you that the folks in Oklahoma have experienced it, and we will walk through it together as a Nation.

With that, Mr. President, I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be

in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SUNSHINE WEEK

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, this week is Sunshine Week, an annual nationwide celebration of the good that comes from peeling back the curtains on government. Sunshine Week coincides with the National Freedom of Information Day and President James Madison's birthday, both of which occur on March 16.

James Madison understood the value of an informed citizenry as a necessary check against those in power. We shouldn't forget his call for the people to "arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."

More recently in our Nation's history, Justice Brandeis declared, "sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants."

These sentiments hold true to this day. A government that operates in darkness—and a public that's kept in the dark—sows the seeds of waste, fraud, and abuse.

In the face of secrecy and obstruction, the public has a vital weapon: the Freedom of Information Act, FOIA.

Over 50 years ago, President Lyndon Johnson signed FOIA into law, establishing the public's judicially enforceable right to government information.

Before FOIA, the people had to justify their need for information to the government, but after FOIA, the government has to justify its refusal to release information to the public. FOIA's enactment marked a crucial step toward a government more accountable to the people.

No doubt, FOIA manifests Congress's recognition of the need to carefully balance the public's right to know and the government's interest in protecting certain information from disclosure, but practice and history demonstrates this balance has all too often been tilted away from transparency.

Many in government have continued to find ways to undermine citizens' right to know under FOIA. Transparency should be the norm, not the exception; yet, when it comes to FOIA requests, we have continued to see a government culture of delay, deny, and defend. When this happens, FOIA's effectiveness is undermined and the public becomes even more skeptical of its government.

We have seen this in one way or another under every administration, both Republican and Democratic, since FOIA's enactment, but the trend toward secrecy and obstruction in recent years should alarm all of us.

According to a March 14 Associated Press report, "The Obama administration in its final year in office spent a record \$36.2 million on legal costs defending its refusal to turn over federal records under [FOIA]."